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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BONN 11830

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: HERBERT WEHNER AT SEVENTY

BEGIN SUMMARY: ON JULY 11, HERBERT WEHNER, ONE OF THE MOST COMPLEX, ENIGMATIC AND POWERFUL POLITICAL FIGURES IN POST-WAR GERMANY, WAS SEVENTY YEARS OLD. FEARED AND RESPECTED BY ENEMIES AND ALLIES ALIKE, THE SPD BUNDESTAG FRAKTION CHAIRMAN IS MORE ALOOF THAN EVER, YET HE REMAINS POLITICALLY UNASSAILABLE.

ALTHOUGH HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH SPD CHAIRMAN BRANDT BORDERS ON BEING POISONOUS (WEHNER ALWAYS CON-
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SIDERED BRANDT SOMETHING OF A LIGHTWEIGHT), AND HIS

RELATIONS WITH CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT ARE, AT BEST, COLD AND CORRECT, WEHNER REMAINS A PRINCIPAL STRATEGIST IN THE INNERMOST CIRCLE OF THE WEST GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

SHOULD THE SPD REMAIN IN POWER AFTER THE OCTOBER 3 BUNDESTAG ELECTION, HERBERT WEHNER WILL REMAIN A MAJOR FORCE IN THE POLITICS OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC.
END SUMMARY.

1. BORN IN DRESDEN ON JULY 11, 1906, THE SON OF A SHOE-MAKER, HERBERT WEHNER WENT TO WORK FOR TWO MARKS A WEEK AT THE AGE OF NINE IN ORDER TO HELP SUPPORT HIS FAMILY WHILE HIS FATHER WAS OFF TO WAR. A BOOKKEEPER BY TRAINING, WEHNER, LIKE HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM, JOINED THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY. HOWEVER, AT AGE 21, IMPATIENT WITH THE BOURGEOIS WAYS OF THE SPD, WEHNER JOINED THE GERMAN COMMUNIST PARTY (KPD). BY THE TIME HE WAS 24 WEHNER WAS A KPD DEPUTY IN THE SAXON LANDTAG.

2. HIS ORGANIZATIONAL BRILLIANCE AND PARLIAMENTARY SKILLS WERE SOON RECOGNIZED AND WEHNER BECAME DEPUTY FRAKTION LEADER. LATER HE BECAME THE PROTEGE OF GERMAN COMMUNIST LEADER ERNST THAELMANN. IN 1933 WEHNER AND HIS WIFE FLED NAZI GERMANY, FIRST TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND LATER TO MOSCOW. DURING THE MOSCOW TRIALS HE WAS HARASSED BY THE NKVD AND WAS INTERROGATED AT LEAST THREE TIMES AT LUBYANKA PRISON.

3. HE SURVIVED THE PURGES AND IN 1941 WEHNER WAS SENT TO SWEDEN WHERE HIS TASK WAS TO SUPPORT THE COMMUNIST UNDERGROUND OPERATING IN NAZI GERMANY. HOWEVER, HE WAS ARRESTED AND TRIED BY THE SWEDISH AUTHORITIES FOR VIOLATING SWEDISH NEUTRALITY AND WAS INTERNED FOR A YEAR. IN 1942, DURING HIS INTERNMENT, WEHNER WAS EXPELLED FROM THE KPD BY THE EXILED GERMAN COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP IN MOSCOW, WHICH INCLUDED HIS OLD RIVAL WALTER ULBRICHT.

4. WHILE IN SWEDEN, HE MET AND MARRIED HIS SECOND
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WIFE, LOTTE BURMESTER, WHO HAD BEEN IMPRISONED FOR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN NAZI GERMANY BEFORE FLEEING TO SWEDEN. HER DAUGHTER, GRETE, SERVES AS PERSONAL ASSISTANT, ADVISOR, AND NURSE TO WEHNER TO THIS DAY. IN 1946 WEHNER AND HIS NEW FAMILY TRAVELED TO WEST GERMANY, WHERE HE AGAIN JOINED THE SPD.

5. ONCE AGAIN WEHNER'S POLITICAL TALENTS WERE QUICKLY

RECOGNIZED. BECAUSE OF HIS COMMUNIST BACKGROUND, SPD CHAIRMAN SCHUMACHER WAS HIGHLY SUSPICIOUS OF WEHNER, BUT FINALLY CONVINCED OF WEHNER'S LOYALTY, SCHUMACHER TOOK HIM INTO HIS INNER CIRCLE OF ADVISORS. IN 1949 SCHUMACHER SUPPORTED WEHNER FOR THE BUNDESTAG WHERE HE HAS SERVED EVER SINCE. HIS PROGRESS IN THE SPD WAS TO LEAD TO THE DEPUTY CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE PARTY, A MINISTER'S PORTFOLIO (INNER-GERMAN AFFAIRS) AND IN 1969, CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE SPD FRAKTION IN THE BUNDESTAG.

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6. ALTHOUGH HE IS ONE OF THE LAST OF THE POLITICAL PROS FROM THE IMMEDIATE POST-WAR PERIOD, WEHNER REMAINS VERY MUCH AN ENIGMA. THIS IS PARTLY BECAUSE HE IS A LONER WHO CONFIDES IN VERY FEW PEOPLE. WHEN HIS MOST TRUSTED AIDE (KARL WIENAND) RESIGNED FROM THE BUNDESTAG BECAUSE OF INVOLVEMENT IN A FINANCIAL SCANDAL, WEHNER BECAME EVEN MORE ISOLATED. IT IS TYPICAL OF HIS PASSION FOR PRIVACY AND HIS IMPATIENCE WITH WHAT HE CONSIDERS PHONINESS THAT HE FLED TO HIS SUMMER HOME IN SWEDEN TO AVOID PUBLIC CELEBRATION OF HIS BIRTHDAY.
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7. HIS SECRETIVENESS, HOWEVER, IS JUST PART OF THE REASON WEHNER'S CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY ARE SO DIFFICULT TO PIN DOWN. IN ADDITION, WEHNER AS A PERSON IS FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS. HE IS FAMOUS FOR BEING CRUEL AND SARCASTIC IN DEALING WITH FELLOW SPD BUNDESTAG DEPUTIES AND, FOR THE MOST PART, THEY ARE INTIMIDATED BY HIM. AT THE SAME TIME HE IS KIND AND CONSIDERATE TO THE PEOPLE WHO WORK FOR HIM SUCH AS HIS SECRETARIES. WHEN HE CHOOSES TO TURN IT ON, HE IS CAPABLE OF CONSIDERABLE CHARM WHICH STANDS OUT IN SHARP CONTRAST TO HIS USUAL DOUR PERSONALITY.

8. HE HAS ABSOLUTELY NO INTEREST IN THE PERSONAL TRAPPINGS OF POWER. HE IS CAPABLE OF INFLICTING CONSIDERABLE PERSONAL ABUSE ON OTHERS, BUT IS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE HIMSELF. AS DAVID BINDER POINTS OUT IN HIS BOOK ON WILLY BRANDT, WEHNER HAS NEVER FORGIVEN BRANDT FOR WHAT HE FEELS WAS THE CAVALIER TREATMENT HE RECEIVED FROM BRANDT FOLLOWING THE SPD ELECTION VICTORY IN 1972. HE HAS IRON DISCIPLINE, THEPATIENCE TO ENDURE LONG AND BORING SPEECHES, AND IS THE FIRST TO ARRIVE AND THE LAST TO LEAVE THE PLENARY SESSIONS OF THE BUNDESTAG.

9. WEHNER'S LEADERSHIP OF THE FRAKTION HAS COME IN FOR INCREASED CRITICISM IN RECENT YEARS. WHILE HE IS CREDITED WITH HOLDING THE COALITION IN THE BUNDESTAG TOGETHER BETWEEN 1969 AND 1972, HIS HARSH AND AUTOCRATIC LEADERSHIP HAS STIFLED INITIATIVE WITHIN THE FRAKTION AND HE HAS MADE NO PROVISION TO TRAIN A SUCCESSOR. ON OCCASION HIS LEADERSHIP EXCESSES HAVE LED TO OPEN REVOLT, AS WAS THE CASE WHEN THE FRAKTION REJECTED WEHNER'S CANDIDATE FOR A KEY DEFENSE POST LAST YEAR. IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, ONLY THE MOST INTREPID DEPUTIES WILL TAKE ON THEIR FRAKTION CHAIRMAN. EVEN FORMER FEDERAL MINISTERS ARE CAREFUL NOT TO RUN AFOUL

OF ONKEL HERBERT.

10. LOOKING BACK OVER THE HISTORY OF THE FEDERAL
REPUBLIC, WEHNER'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE EXCEPTIONAL.
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EVEN THE SPRINGER PRESS RATES WEHNER AS SECOND ONLY TO
ADENAUER IN HAVING LEFT HIS MARK ON THE POLITICAL
DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRG. HE WAS ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL
ARCHITECTS OF THE 1959 GODESBERG PROGRAM WHICH LED
THE SPD OUT OF THE IDEOLOGICAL GHETTO OF A CLASS PARTY
TO THE STATUS OF A BROADLY-BASED "VOLKSPARTEI." IN
AN EMOTIONAL SPEECH AT THE GODESBERG PARTEITAG, HE
DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS ONE OF THOSE WHO HAD BEEN "BURNED
BY COMMUNISM." AT GODESBERG AND LATER IN THE BUNDESTAG
HE CALLED FOR THE SPD TO TURN AWAY FROM ITS TRADITIONAL
POSITIONS AND TO ACCEPT THE TWO PILLARS OF POST-WAR
GERMAN SECURITY AND PROSPERITY: THE ATLANTIC
ALLIANCE AND A FREE MARKET ECONOMY. WEHNER'S GODESBERG
SPEECH WAS TRULY A TURNING POINT IN THE HISTORY OF THE
GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY.

11. WEHNER IS ALSO CREDITED WITH HAVING CONVINCED THE
SPD TO ENTER INTO THE GRAND COALITION WITH THE CDU IN
1966. HIS GOAL WAS TO DEMONSTRATE TO THE GERMAN VOTER
THAT THE SPD COULD GOVERN RESPONSIBLY. AT THE SAME
TIME, THE PLOY GAVE WILLY BRANDT, AS VICE CHANCELLOR
AND FOREIGN MINISTER, THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE HIMSELF
ON THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STAGE. WEHNER WAS
SUCCESSFUL AND WHEN CHANGES WITHIN THE FDP MADE A
SOCIAL/LIBERAL COALITION POSSIBLE, THE GERMAN PUBLIC WAS
READY TO ACCEPT AN SPD-LED GOVERNMENT.

12. ON PAR WITH THE DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING WEHNER
THE MAN, IS THE PROBLEM OF LOCATING THE REAL SOURCE OF
WEHNER'S POLITICAL POWER. HE DOES NOT HAVE A TRADI-
TIONAL POWER BASE IN THE PARTY, NOR IS HE A POPULAR
FIGURE LIKE WILLY BRANDT. HE DOES NOT REPRESENT ANY

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PARTICULAR IDEOLOGICAL WING WITHIN THE PARTY, BUT HAS
ROOTS WHICH GO DOWN DEEPER INTO THE ORGANIZATION THAN
THOSE OF ANY OTHER NATIONAL SPD POLITICIAN. THERE ARE
TWO REASONS WEHNER ELICITS THE LOYALTY OF THE SPD
APPARATUS: A) HE FUNCTIONS IN THE PARTY APPARATUS AS
A SORT OF TEUTONIC GODFATHER - WHEN ANYONE IN THE PARTY
HAS A SERIOUS PROBLEM, HE CAN GO TO "ONKEL HERBERT" FOR
A SOLUTION; AND B) HE HAS ALWAYS BEEN READY TO HELP THE
PARTY LOCALS WHEN THE SMALLEST "ORTSVEREIN" NEEDS A
SPEAKER OR ORGANIZATIONAL HELP, HERBERT WEHNER IS
ALWAYS WILLING TO ASSIST.

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13. IN ADDITION TO HIS ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS AND
STRATEGIC CUNNING, WEHNER HAS AN ADVANTAGE OVER MOST
POLITICIANS IN THAT HE IS WITHOUT PERSONAL AMBITION.

HE COVETS NO HIGHER OFFICE NOR PERSONAL GLORY. HIS ALMOST RELIGIOUS DEVOTION TO THE PARTY (I.E., THE SPD) IS ONLY UNDERSTANDABLE IN LIGHT OF HIS COMMUNIST BACKGROUND. HIS DISCIPLINE, ENERGY (REMARKABLE IN A MAN OF SEVENTY WHO IS DIABETIC), AND HIS ABILITY TO THINK BEYOND THE NEXT ELECTION HAVE MADE HIM IRREPLACEABLE, IF NOT INDISPENSABLE TO THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

14. HERBERT WEHNER IS NOT, OF COURSE, AN UNMIXED BLESSING FOR THE SPD. HE HAS NEVER BEEN POPULAR WITH THE GERMAN PUBLIC OUTSIDE OF THE SPD. MANY CONSERVATIVES REMAIN CONVINCED THAT WEHNER IS A COMMUNIST SPY AND THAT HIS EXPULSION FROM THE KPD IN 1942 WAS JUST A PLOY TO PERMIT HIM TO INFILTRATE THE SPD. THIS SUSPICION IS REINFORCED BY WEHNER'S PERSONAL TIES TO AND RELATIONS WITH MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP IN THE USSR AND GDR. HE MAKES AN INVITING POLITICAL TARGET, AND WHENEVER POSSIBLE, THE UNION PARTIES SEEK TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST WEHNER JUST AS THE SPD CAMPAIGNS AGAINST FRANZ JOSEF STRAUSS.

15. HERBERT WEHNER IS NOT WITHOUT DETRACTORS, EVEN WITHIN THE SPD. BRANDT AND HIS SUPPORTERS WILL NEVER FORGIVE WEHNER FOR WHAT THEY CONSIDER HIS BETRAYAL OF BRANDT DURING THE 1974 GUILLAUME CRISIS. THEY POINT TO WEHNER'S UNTOWARD STATEMENTS ABOUT THE CHANCELLOR DURING WEHNER'S VISIT TO MOSCOW IN 1973 AS AN INDICATION THAT THE FRAKTION CHAIRMAN WAS PREPARING BRANDT'S DOWNFALL. HIS SHARP TONGUE AS WELL AS OLD POWER STRUGGLES WITHIN THE SPD HAVE ALSO LEFT HIM WITH MANY ENEMIES. NEVERTHELESS, MOST OF HIS OPPONENTS WITHIN THE PARTY RESTRICT THEIR ANTI-WEHNER ACTIVITIES TO SNIPING FROM THE SIDELINES TO AVOID FACING HIS WRATH.

16. WEHNER HAS ALSO BEEN OUTFOXED ON OCCASION. IF, AS IT APPEARED, THE PURPOSE OF WEHNER'S STATEMENTS DURING HIS WARSAW VISIT IN 1976 WAS TO INSURE THAT THE UNION

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PARTIES VETOED THE POLISH AGREEMENTS IN THE BUNDES RAT AND THEREBY PROVIDE THE SPD WITH A CAMPAIGN ISSUE, WEHNER CERTAINLY FAILED. IN FACT, THE SPD MISHANDLING OF THE POLISH AGREEMENTS PROVIDED THE CDU/CSU CHANCELLOR CANDIDATE KOHL WITH A POLITICAL TRIUMPH. HE HAS ALSO SUPPORTED POLICIES WHICH IN RETROSPECT WERE DOOMED TO FAILURE (E.G., THE WEHNER-SPONSORED "DEUTSCHLAND POLITIK" OF MID 1959).

17. WHEN ASKED ON HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY WHAT THE SPD MEANT TO HIM, WEHNER REPLIED: "THE SPD EVOLVED

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FROM THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT (ARBEITERBEWEGUNG) IN GERMANY. IT HAS ENDURED TWO WORLD WARS AND DICTATORSHIP, YET IT STILL REPRESENTS THE MAJOR GOAL OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT -- THE FULL REALIZATION OF HUMAN POTENTIAL." WEHNER'S FREQUENT REFERRAL TO THE "ARBEITERBEWEGUNG" IS A KEY TO HIS COMMITMENT. HE COMES OUT OF THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT AND HIS DEDICATION AS A SOCIAL DEMOCRAT AND AS A COMMUNIST IS UNDERSTANDABLE IN TERMS OF THAT COMMITMENT. THIS ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT TO

THE "ARBEITERBEWEGUNG" IDENTIFIES WEHNER WITH AN EARLIER AGE AND AN EARLIER SPD. THE NEW SPD IS MORE AND MORE A CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTY OF INTELLECTUALS, WHITE COLLAR WORKERS AND TECHNO-CRATS AND IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE PRESENT-DAY SPD WILL PRODUCE ANY HERBERT WEHNERS.

18. NOT SO LONG AGO WEHNER TOLD HORST EHMKE THAT HE WAS WORRIED WHETHER HE WOULD LIVE VERY MUCH LONGER. WHEN EHMKE POINTED OUT THAT WEHNER HAD BEEN MAKING SUCH STATEMENTS FOR YEARS, WEHNER GAVE EHMKE ONE OF HIS LOOKS, WHICH USUALLY STRIKE FEAR INTO THE HEARTS OF THE BRAVEST ADVERSARY, AND SAID: "DYING ISN'T DIFFICULT, EVERYONE HAS TO FACE THAT AT SOME POINT. BUT TO LEAVE THE PARTY IN THE HANDS OF THE LIKES OF YOU AND HELMUT SCHMIDT -- THAT I CANNOT ENDURE." UNTIL HE CAN ENDURE TURNING CONTROL OVER TO OTHERS OR WHEN AGE AND HIS HEALTH FORCE HIM TO STEP DOWN, ONKEL HERBERT WILL REMAIN A FORCE TO BE DEALT WITH IN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC POLITICS. CASH.

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